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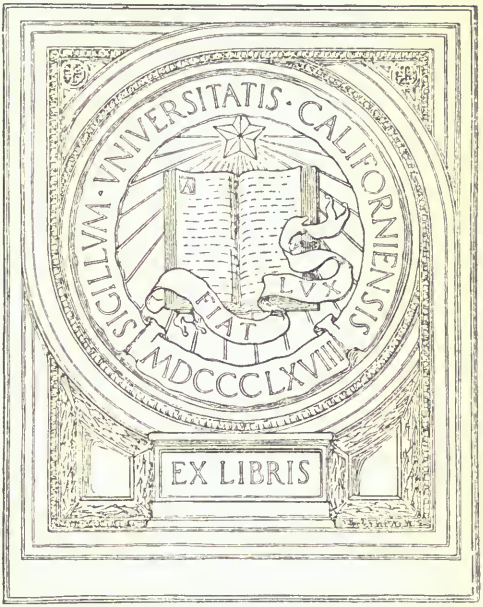

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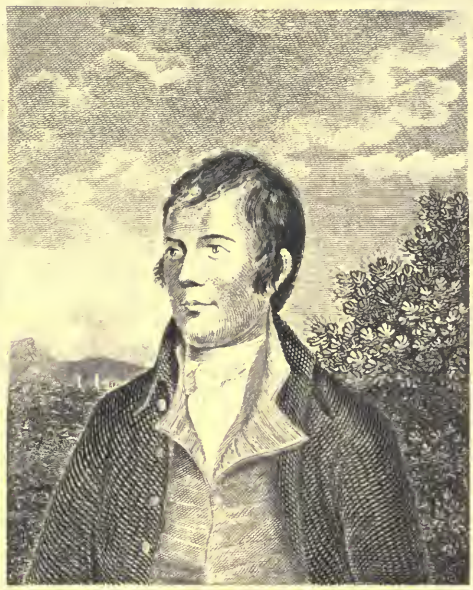

ROBERT BURNS

A

# CRITIQUE

ON THE

# POEMS

OF

# ROBERT BURNS.

*ILLUSTRATED BY ENGRAVINGS.*

EDINBURGH:

*Printed by John Brown,*

FOR BELL & BRADFUTE, EDINBURGH, W. ANDERSON, STIRLING,
AND THOMAS HAMILTON, LONDON.

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

If the following remarks on the Poems of Burns tend in any degree to point out their beauties and their defects to the great body of those readers who admire or censure them without knowing why, they will answer the only purpose for which they are offered to the public. To the poetical reader of highly cultivated taste they are not offered; and therefore nothing like *philosophical* criticism has been here attempted. If the country gentleman, the farmer, the artisan, and all those who have moved in the same sphere with the poet, shall be led to look into themselves for the truth of those pictures which he has painted in such vivid colours, the object of this publication will be completely answered. It is proper

to add, that the arrangement which has been here followed is that in which the poems are printed in the edition published by the trustees of the late James Morison, bookseller in Perth; though the remarks may be equally acceptable and equally useful to those who are possessed of the other editions. The philosophical critic and the man of taste are again requested to observe, that no attempt is here made to instruct *them;* and that the sole object of the present publication is to enable men of less cultivated minds to instruct themselves, by the aid of engravings, illustrative of the poetry.

*Directions to the Binder for placing the Plates.*

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A

# CRITIQUE

ON

# THE POEMS OF BURNS.

AMONG modern poets, it would be difficult to mention one who has displayed greater originality of genius than BURNS, the Ayrshire Ploughman. The range of his thoughts was not indeed very extensive, nor were the subjects on which he wrote greatly varied; for as the most powerful genius cannot create one simple idea, but must content itself with making different combinations of those which are treasured up in the memory, an illiterate bard, who has not stored his mind by travel and attentive observation, has comparatively but a small number of materials on which to work. Such a bard, however, may possess, in the highest degree, the talents essential to his art.

The province of poetry is to describe, in vivid colours, nature and passion; and the most illiterate man, of a vigorous mind, may describe with accuracy such scenes of nature as he has seen, and such passions as he has experienced either in himself or in others; but he must do more than this to be entitled to the honour of a poet. In genuine poetry, there is something analogous to creation, or at least to the reduction of chaos into form. To describe only individual scenes, is to write *natural history* rather than *poetry*. The poet must be able to analyse the ideas of individual scenes into their constituent parts; to combine these parts into new forms—possible, however, in themselves, and analogous to what he has actually witnessed; and to exhibit, in a striking point of view, the effects of the various passions—not only such effects as he has known to flow from them, but all such effects as they are naturally capable of producing.

All this may be done by an illiterate poet who has never travelled, as well as by him who has had the benefit of a liberal education, and made the tour of Europe: but it is obvious that the range of the former must be much more limited than the range of the latter. His descriptions, however, if not so varied, may be more vivid; for the learned poet is too apt to intermix what he

has read or heard with what he has seen; and the copy of a copy can never produce the same powerful effect with a faithful painting from nature.

Had Burns attempted to paint the face of a country quite different from any that he had ever seen, or to describe the manners of courtiers, he would certainly have failed; or had he possessed, on the other hand, the advantages of a liberal education, it may be doubted whether his language would have been so perfectly adapted to the description of those scenes, with which alone he was thoroughly acquainted. But, by selecting all his subjects from low life as it actually presented itself to his own eyes, and writing in the very language which is spoken by the heroes and heroines of his poems, his powerful imagination has produced an effect, on the mind of every man of taste to whom his language is intelligible, similar to that which his latest biographer, and one of the most judicious of his critics*, has declared that the first perusal of his poems produced on him.

"Before finishing a page," says this modest though able writer, "I experienced emotions of

* See Burns's Poems, published (1811) by the trustees of the late James Morison, and sold by Bell and Bradfute, Edinburgh, and Anderson, Stirling.

surprise and delight, of which I had never been conscious before. The language which I had then begun to despise, as fit for nothing but colloquial vulgarity, seemed to be transformed, by the sorcery of genius, into the genuine language of poetry. It expressed every idea with a brevity and force, and bent itself to every subject with a pliancy, in which the most perfect languages too often fail. In this dialect I found the characters and customs of those by whom it is employed, their sentiments, their virtues, their passions, their follies, and the scenes in which they act, pourtrayed with a strength of resemblance, and with so masterly a selection of those strokes on which resemblance depends, as made the original draw life and interest from the picture. Every line awakened a train of associations; every phrase struck a note which led the mind to perform the accompaniment. The whole abounded with conceptions that were new, yet natural; and with images which had all the distinctness and illumination of realities. In general character, the description gave it the clearness and precision of individuality, while individuals were at once perceived, even by strangers to the objects represented, to be offsets from the great root of human nature. On every page the stamp of genius was impressed. All was touched by a

hand of that astonishing dexterity, as to seem only performing its easiest and most habitual functions, when accomplishing what every other would attempt in vain."

Although this critic, being a native of the same district of country with the poet, must have perceived, in the description of rural scenes that were familiar to him, beauties which a stranger cannot observe; yet, from attention to the particular object of each poem, every man of taste must be convinced of the justness of his general criticism. Every man of taste feels a kind of *intuitive* conviction, that the various scenes are described with accuracy, and that each actor exhibited on the stage performs the part that is natural to him.

Burns, like many other poets, has delivered his sentiments of men and manners occasionally in fables or apologues; a species of composition of very high antiquity, and well adapted for the purpose of conveying unwelcome truths to the ears of greatness, under the despotic governments of the East, where the apologue appears to have been invented. The expediency of exhibiting beings irrational and inanimate, in this age and country, speaking and acting with human interests and passions, does not indeed seem very evident; but there must be some charm in such composi-

tions, for which reason cannot easily account; since fables, when written with liveliness, are universally popular. That in liveliness the fables of BURNS have no cause to shrink from a comparison with those of any one of his predecessors, will, by the reader of taste, be readily granted.

In his whole collection of poems, there are but three justly entitled to the appellation of *apologues:* these are, THE TWA DOGS, THE BRIGS OF AYR, and THE HUMBLE PETITION OF BRUAR WATER. The fable of *The Twa Dogs* stands, in most editions, as the first of his poems, though it was not the first that was written and circulated among his friends; and it has certainly all the excellencies of that species of fable with which it must be classed. The two dogs are made to speak and reason like two men, and to enter each into the interests of their respective masters. *Cæsar*, the gentleman's dog, and the scholar, is exhibited as expressing his surprise how such dogs as *Luath*, the ploughman's *collie*, can contrive to live---how indeed such *men* as his master can contrive to live! He then gives a description of the feasting and profusion which prevail daily in the house of his own master, and which descend from the table of "the gentry" to the hall of the servants, where even "the whipper-in," of whom this rational dog talks with great con-

## THE TWA DOGS.

POOR TENANT BODIES, SCANT O' CASH

HOW THEY MAUN THOLE A FACTOR'S SNASH.

tempt, eats a better dinner than any farmer on his Honour's land.

Luath, in reply, admits that ploughmen and *cotters* live very poorly; but, after giving a lively picture of their various distresses, he observes, that, though he cannot account for it, they are generally contented.

Cæsar, who possesses all the feelings of a benevolent landlord, then animadverts on the neglect which the lower orders of the peasantry experience from those whom he calls "the gentry;" and adds, with the feelings of the poet himself,

"I've notic'd, on our laird's court-day,
An' mony a time my heart's been wae,
Poor tenant bodies, scant o' cash,
How they maun thole a factor's snash:
He'll stamp an' threaten, curse an' swear,
He'll apprehend them, poind their gear;
While they maun stand wi' aspect humble,
An' hear it a', an' fear an' tremble."

Burns had himself probably felt what he calls the *snash* of a factor or land-steward; and, from his own feelings, he has painted a scene which every reader seems to behold.

Luath returns to the defence of his associates (for he speaks as if he were a *tenant body* himself), contending, that they are not so wretched as his

friend supposes; and he gives very sufficient proofs that they enjoy much happiness at little expense. He admits, however, that there is likewise much misery among the poor, which he attributes to the rascally factors or land-stewards, who labour to ingratiate themselves with their masters by racking the rents of their lands, to enable them to procure seats in parliament for *the good of Britain.*

This observation gives the poet an opportunity of making Cæsar expatiate on the venality of the house of commons, and on the dissipation and extravagance of the members; to which Luath replies,

> " Hech man! dear Sirs! is that the gate
> They waste sae mony a braw estate?
> Are we sae foughten an' harass'd
> For gear to gang that gate at last?"

Burns was not, when he wrote this poem, so entangled in factious politics as his latest biographer represents him to have been afterwards. His two dogs, therefore, quit that thorny labyrinth very quickly, and return to their discussion of the comparative happiness of the rich and the poor; which, by sound arguments, they prove to be more nearly balanced than perhaps either the poor or the rich generally suppose. To Luath,

who, like many in the lower orders of society, expresses his opinion that the life of the great must be a life of pleasure, Cæsar replies,

> " L—d man ! were ye but whyles whare I am,
> The gentles ye wad ne'er envy 'em."

It may be objected to the classing of *The Brigs of Ayr* among legitimate apologues, that they are the *spirits* which preside over the bridges, and not the bridges themselves, which carry on the dialogue; and that this poem more nearly resembles a fairy tale than one of the fables of Phædrus.

The spirits indeed are made to perch each on the bridge under his own immediate protection, and to commence the angry dialogue; but we instantly lose sight of the spirits, which are not indeed purely spiritual, and consider the *brigs* themselves as animated, and railing at each other.

In this altercation, as one of his critics justly observes, " we take part with the venerable and insulted ancient, as with the reduced but dignified representative of an honourable ancestry; while we scorn and resent the petulance of its rival, as of the disgusting triumph of upstart ostentation and prosperous vulgarity." This, however, we could not do, did our imagination rest on the spirits as the speakers: it is the Gothic archi-

tecture of the *Auld Brig* that interests us, and makes the poem a perfect apologue, at least until the railers are silenced by a new race of spirits. But whether a legitimate apologue or not, this fable has not surely equal merit with the *Twa Dogs*.

If an apologue be properly defined by Johnson, *The Humble Petition of Bruar Water* has an unquestionable claim to that appellation. "A fable or apologue," says that great critic*, "seems to be, in its genuine state, a narrative, in which beings irrational, and sometimes inanimate *(arbores loquuntur, non tantum ferœ)*, are, for the purpose of moral instruction, feigned to act and speak with human interests and passions."

To this description the Petition of Bruar Water certainly conforms. It contains a narrative, in which the stream addresses the Duke of Athol with human passion, excited by the want of trees and shrubbery to shade it from the scorching heat of the summer's sun. There is not indeed much *moral* instruction in this narrative; but if there be morality in preventing the inferior animals from suffering unnecessary pain, there is a little moral instruction conveyed in the following stanza.

* In his life of Gay.

"The lightly-jumping, glowrin trouts,
That through my waters play,
If in their random wanton spouts
They near the margin stray;
If, hapless chance! they linger lang,
I'm scorching up so shallow,
They're left the whitening stanes amang,
In gasping death to wallow."

Burns was ever ready to employ all the powers of his genius in painting the joys of intoxication. His two poems, entitled, *Scotch Drink*, and *The Author's Earnest Cry and Prayer to the Scotch Representatives in the House of Commons*, are both on this unworthy subject; but though we condemn the tendency of these verses, it is impossible not to admire the vivid and well defined colours of the painting displayed in them. Nor are they Bacchanalian scenes only which are described in these poems. In the former, we have a very pleasing picture of the contentment with which the peasant feeds on bread and beer. The favourite liquor of Burns, when these poems were written, appears to have been whisky or ale; for he had not then been introduced into the gay, and to him ruinous, scenes of Edinburgh; and therefore, celebrating the virtues of his Scotch drink, he says,

" Thou clears the head o' doited lear ;
Thou cheers the heart o' drooping care ;
Thou strings the nerves o' labour sair,
At's weary toil ;
Thou even brightens dark despair
Wi' gloomy smile.

" Aft, clad in massy siller weed,
Wi' gentles thou erects thy head ;
Yet humbly kind, in time o' need,
The poor man's wine,
His wee drap parritch, or his bread,
Thou kitchens fine."

In this poem ale or beer seems to share his favour equally with whisky ; but in his " Earnest Cry and Prayer," whisky is described as the *summum bonum*, not of himself only, but of his countrymen in general. It was written on the occasion of some restrictions which had been laid on the Scotch distilleries, and addressed to the Scottish members in the house of commons ; to whom the poet says,

" Arouse, my boys ! exert your mettle
To get auld Scotland back her *kettle*,
Or, faith ! I'll wad my new pleugh-pettle,
Ye'll see't or lang,
She'll teach you, wi' a reekin whittle,
Anither sang.

* * * * *

SCOTCH DRINK.

HIS WEE DRAP PARRITCH, OR HIS BREAD

THOU KITCHENS FINE

" An', L—d, if ance they pit her till't,
Her tartan petticoat she'll kilt,
An' durk an' pistol at her belt,
She'll tak the streets,
An' rin her whittle to the hilt
I' the first she meets!"

Having pursued this strain through many stanzas, and concluded his " Earnest Cry and Prayer," he seems to have recollected that he had in fact libelled his countrymen, by representing them as ready to rise in rebellion for *whisky*. To do away this impression from the minds of his readers, he adds to the prayer a postscript, in which the hardihood, loyalty, and courage of the Scotch, are duly praised, but attributed, at the same time, to the virtues of his favourite liquor. After describing the cowardice and effeminacy of those who drink wine, and live under " warmer skies," he adds,

" But bring a *Scotsman* frae his hill,
Clap in his cheek a *Highland gill*,
Say, such is royal GEORGE's will,
An' there's the foe;
He has nae thought but how to kill
Twa at a blow.

" Nae cauld, faint-hearted doubtings tease him.
Death comes!—wi' fearless eye he sees him.

Wi' bluidy hand a welcome gi'es him;
An' when he fa's,
His latest draught o' breathing lea'es him
In faint huzzas."

This is such painting as hath seldom been surpassed, unless by BURNS himself in some of his other poems. By him, however, it has been surpassed in *The Holy Fair*, *Halloween*, and *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, which, though poems of very different kinds, all exhibit the manners of rural life in that part of Scotland where BURNS was born, and passed his earliest and best days.

In *The Holy Fair*, as has been well observed, the first stanza contains one of the finest descriptions of a summer morning that is to be found in any language. It is, however, in describing manners that, even in this poem, BURNS chiefly displays his superiority over other bards: but to enable the English reader to feel the force and enjoy the beauty of those descriptions, it will be necessary to explain to him what is meant by a *holy fair*.

It is universally known, that in Scotland the sacrament of the Lord's supper is, in country parishes, seldom celebrated above once in the year; and that, as no festivals are kept in the church of Scotland, the summer is chosen for the

season of that celebration. The sacrament is never celebrated in contiguous churches on the same day; for, to add solemnity to that ordinance, it is deemed of importance to have five or six clergymen collected at the celebration, and sermons preached by them all to the immense concourse of people who flock together from the neighbouring parishes. The sacrament is administered in the church, where a sermon is preached before the administration commences, by the minister of the parish, generally on the doctrine of redemption, or on the import of that rite which was instituted in remembrance of it, and in which they are so soon to be engaged. The church, however, would not probably contain one third of the people who assemble on the occasion; and therefore, in the church-yard, or some other contiguous and convenient place, is erected a kind of tent, from which the several ministers, in rotation, preach to the promiscuous crowd seated on the grass around them.

At the period when this practice was first introduced, it may have been productive of good effects; but in this age of levity and lukewarmness, it is not easy to figure to one's self any consequence that can result from it which is not evil. Multitudes are drawn together from great distances, for the sake, as they pretend, of being

edified by a variety of excellent sermons: but that this is a *mere pretence*, is evident from the very name of *Holy Fair* given to those assemblies by such as most regularly frequent them. The practice, which is discountenanced by the most enlightened clergymen of the present day, is now much less prevalent than it was, even when BURNS wrote this poem; and it is probable, that in less than twenty years hence there will be nothing in Scotland at all resembling the *Holy Fair* described by him. Would the clergy agree, as in all other churches, and as was proposed many years ago by one of the greatest ornaments of their body*, to administer the sacrament on the same day in every church in the kingdom, there would indeed be much less *preaching* than at present on such occasions, but there would likewise be much less *indecency:* the people would gradually "learn not to think of *men* above that which is written, nor to be puffed up for one against another;" whilst they would soon discover, that to hear sermons is not the most important purpose for which they are enjoined "not to forsake the assembling of themselves together" on any Lord's day, but more especially when the sacrament of the Lord's supper is dispensed.

* The late Dr Erskine of Edinburgh.

That BURNS was incited to write his *Holy Fair* by a wish to promote so salutary a reformation as this, is not very probable; but the picture which he paints of hypocrisy, drunkenness, and obscenity, prevalent at such meetings, though perhaps overcharged, has certainly some resemblance to what he must have witnessed at them: and if so, it ought to put an end to *holy fairs* in every church. We are, however, concerned at present only with the powers of poetry displayed on this subject; and we are persuaded that the following description is so perfectly just, as to bring before the mind's eye of every man who understands the language the very scene described. After an exquisite account of the bustle and confusion occasioned by such a heterogeneous collection of persons, some really pious, some hypocrites, and others blackguards---of prostitutes, and rural lovers of a more virtuous character---all met at one place for such a variety of purposes; he thus introduces to his readers the preacher who took the lead on the occasion.

" Now a' the congregation o'er
  Is silent expectation,
For ****** speels the holy door,
  Wi' tidings o' d-mn-t--n.
Should *Hornie*, as in ancient days,
  'Mang sons o' G— present him,

The very sight o' ******'s face
To's ain het hame had sent him
Wi' fright that day.

" Hear how he clears the points o' faith
Wi' rattlin an' thumpin !
Now meekly calm—now wild in wrath,
He's stampin an' he's jumpin !
His lengthen'd chin, his turn'd-up snout,
His *eldritch** squeel an' gestures,
O how they fire the heart devout,
Like cantharidian plasters,
On sic a day !"

Whoever has witnessed the extravagant action of any celebrated field preacher, will confess that this picture, though richly coloured, is not over-charged. But a different picture succeeds it. The *real judges* of orthodoxy are driven, by some preacher of morals in an English style, from the environs of the tent to the *ale-house !*

" Now butt an' ben the change-house fills
Wi' *yill-caup*† commentators ;
Here's crying out for bakes‡ an' gills,
An' there the pint-stoup clatters ;

* Ghastly, frightful.
† Vessels holding ale.
‡ A kind of biscuits.

## HOLY FAIR.

THE LADS AN LASSES, BLYTHELY BENT
TO MIND BAITH SAUL AND BODY,
SIT ROUND THE TABLE, WEEL CONTENT,
AND STEER ABOUT THE TODDY.

While thick an' thrang, an' loud an' lang,
Wi' logic an' wi' scripture,
They raise a din, that, in the end,
Is like to breed a rupture
O' wrath that day.

" Leeze me on drink ! it gi'es us mair
Than either school or college ;
It kindles wit, it waukens lair,
It pangs us fou o' knowledge.
Be't whisky gill, or penny wheep,
Or ony stronger potion,
It never fails, on drinking deep,
To kittle up our notion
By night or day.

" The lads an' lasses, blythely bent
To mind baith saul an' body,
Sit round the table, weel content,
An' steer about the toddy.
On this ane's dress, an' that ane's leuk,
They're making observations ;
While some are cozie i' the neuk,
An' forming assignations
To meet some day."

If this painting be as correct as it is vivid, the concluding stanza of the poem is most natural.

" How mony hearts this day converts
O' sinners an' o' lasses !

Their hearts o' stane gin night are gane
As saft as ony flesh is.
There's some are fou o' love divine;
There's some are fou o' brandy;
An' mony jobs that day begin,
May end in *houghmagandie* *
Some ither day."

It is observed by a very judicious critic†, that Burns "was scarcely excelled by Lucian himself in that species of humour which is produced by debasing objects of the most serious and solemn magnitude to the level of easy and indifferent familiarity. In the verses on *Dr Hornbook*, where the poet relates his interview and social chat with Death, whose bony figure is drawn with equal drollery and correctness, how is the scythe of that dreaded Being stript of its terrors, when it serves only to suggest this homely and neighbourly address---

'Guid e'en t'ye, friend! hae ye been mawin,
When ither folk are busy sawin?'

"Nor is the familiarity less, when Death, like

* Either *fornication* or *public penance* for having committed that sin.

† See the Poems, in two volumes, printed for the Trustees of James Morison, Bell and Bradfute, and Anderson.

DEATH AND DOCTOR HORNBOOK.

the starved apothecary, pleads his poverty, as an excuse for following an unpopular calling:

> ‘ Folk maun do something for their bread,
> An’ sae maun Death.”

This is perfectly just; and to these instances of Burns’s success in bringing down the most awful objects to the level of even ludicrous familiarity, may be added another from the same poem. Death, after complaining of the ignorant quack Dr Hornbook, for encroaching on his province, and killing, by his poisonous nostrums, those who ought to have fallen by his scythe or dart, thus addresses the poet, in the true *gossip* mode of communicating a secret:

> “ But, hark! I’ll tell you of a plot,
> *Tho’ dinna ye be speaking o’t;*
> I’ll nail the self-conceited sot
> As dead’s a herrin;
> Neist time we meet, I’ll wad a groat,
> He gets his fairin.”

The critic, who has been already so often quoted, justly observes, that “ this poem has all the excellence of which its description admits; and that though humour be its ground-work, it is occasionally streaked with a vein of sublimity; as

in the expression, ‘ It spak howe,’ and in the incident which puts an end to the conversation.

“ But just as he began to tell,
The auld kirk hammer strak the bell,
Some wee short hour ayont the *twal*,
Which rais’d us baith :
I took the way that pleas’d mysel,
An’ sae did Death.”

*The Ordination* is a poem of great merit in its way; though in it, as in *Holy Willie’s Prayer*, the author sometimes writes very irreverently on the most serious and awful subjects. His object, in both these poems, is to hold up to contempt and derision the peculiar doctrines of Calvinism, and other topics of orthodoxy, which he had probably never studied, and did not understand. That there is great danger in constantly preaching on such topics to a mixt and illiterate audience, cannot perhaps be denied; but that mode of preaching will not be banished from the church by describing it in such ludicrous terms as the following :

“ Now, auld Kilmarnock, cock thy tail,
An’ toss thy horns fu’ canty;
Nae mair thou’lt rowte out-owre the dale,
Because thy pasture’s scanty;

For lapfu's large o' *gospel kail*
Shall fill thy crib in plenty,
An' *runts o' grace*, the pick an' wale,
No gi'en by way o' dainty,
But ilka day."

THE poem, entitled *The Calf*, may have been a good *jeu d'esprit* on the occasion of its being written; but it seems hardly worthy of a place in a collection of the author's works.

*THE Address to the De'il* is a poem of a very superior order; in which the bard details all the superstitious opinions of the Scottish vulgar concerning his infernal majesty's appearances on earth to frighten solitary or midnight travellers; his influence exerted, either immediately by himself or by his imps, on cattle and on men; his being raised by the mystic rites of masons and others; his carrying off to hell the youngest brother on these occasions, unless his rage be stopt by the present of a cock or a cat; his wandering in church-yards with warlocks and witches; and his having once appeared to the poet himself in the form of a *rash-buss*, when, says he,

" The cudgel in my nieve did shake,
Each bristled hair stood like a stake,
When, wi' an eldritch stoor, quaick, quaick;
Amang the springs,
Awa ye squatter'd like a drake,
On whistling wings."

This poem concludes with a stanza, which seems to indicate that BURNS had adopted the opinion of Origen respecting future punishment; though it is not easy to conceive where he could pick up that opinion.

" But fare ye weel, auld *Nickie-ben!*
O wad ye tak a thought an' men'!
Ye ablins might—I dinna ken—
Still hae a *stake:*
I'm wae to think upon yon den,
Even for your sake."

IN the order in which BURNS'S poems follow each other in the most common editions, *The Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie, the Author's only Pet Yowe,* and *Poor Mailie's Elegy,* are placed immediately after *The Address to the De'il.* They are both interesting poems, but have obtained, perhaps, praise at least equal to their merit. In delivering her dying requests, by *doytin Hughoc,* to her kind master, Mailie

appears, not as a ewe, but as an humble and grateful domestic; and the sentiments which she utters are in that character natural and proper, and admirably expressed.

*The Elegy on Mailie* was confessedly * suggested by the Reverend Mr Skinner's *Ewie wi' the Crooked Horn;* and notwithstanding the superiority of BURNS's genius, it is, though very fine, generally admitted to be, like other imitations, inferior to the original. From the following imitations, which seem the most striking, the reader will be able to form some judgment for himself of the respective merits of the two poems.

" When ither ewies lap the dyke,
An' ate the kail, for a' the tyke,
My ewie never play'd the like,
But tyc'd about† the barn wa'."

SKINNER.

" I wat she was a sheep o' sense,
An' could behave hersel wi' mense;
I'll say't, she never brak a fence
Through thievish greed."

BURNS.

* See the Posthumous Works of the Reverend John Skinner, at Langside, Vol. III.

† *Tyc'd about*, walked *slowly* or *warily* about.

" O! had she died o' crook or cauld,
As ewies do when they grow auld,
It wad na been, by mony fauld,
Sae sair a heart to nane o's a':
For a' the claith that we hae worn,
Frae her an' her's sae aften shorn;
The loss o' her we could hae borne,
Had fairstrae death ta'en her awa."

SKINNER.

" It's no the loss o' warl's gear
That could sae bitter draw the tear,
Or mak our Bardie, dowie, wear
The mourning weed:
He's lost a friend an' neebor dear,
In Mailie dead."

BURNS.

" But thus, poor thing! to lose her life
Aneath a bluidy villain's knife;
I'm really fley't that our guidwife
Will never win aboon't ava.
O, a' ye bards benorth Kinghorn,
Call your muses up, an' mourn
Our ewie wi' the crooked horn,
Stown frae us, an' fell'd, an' a'."

SKINNER.

" Wae worth the man wha first did shape
That vile wanchancie thing—*a rape!*

It maks guid fellows girn an' gape
Wi' choakin dread,
An' Robin's bannet wave wi' crape,
For Mailie dead.

" O, a' ye bards on bonnie Doon,
An' wha on Ayr your chanters tune,
Come, join the melancholious croon
O' Robin's reed !
His heart will never get aboon
His Mailie dead."

BURNS.

That in these concluding stanzas of the two poems, the imitation falls far short of the original, will admit of no doubt. BURNS diminishes the effect of his plaintive song by his ludicrous allusion to the gallows.

THE poetical epistle to J. S. which generally comes next to *Poor Mailie's Elegy* in the order of BURNS's poems, seems to have been written before he had acquired courage to appear as an author before the public. It is full of expressions of regard and esteem for the person to whom it is addressed; and it paints, in very lively colours, the bard's dread of going with his effusions to the press, at the very time that he is praying for " ay routh o' rhymes." This mixed feeling of

confidence in his own powers, combined with a dread of the public decision, is described with his usual felicity.

In *The Dream*, addressed to the king and royal family in the year 1786, the poet contrives to declare his own sentiments of the American war, and of the ministers by whom it was carried on, as well as of the conduct of some of the princes, in very plain terms, but in a manner that could give no offence. He then glances at some particular hardships to which British princesses are necessarily subjected; and concludes the poem with the following warning:

"God bless you a'! consider now,
Ye're unco muckle dautet;
But ere the *course* o' life be through,
It may be bitter sautet:
An' I hae seen their *coggie* fou,
That yet hae tarrow't at it;
But or the *day* was done, I trow,
The laggen they hae clautet
Fu' clean that day."

Had this been addressed to the royal family of France at that period, it might be said to have been written by inspiration more than poetical.

*The Vision* has been often mentioned as one of the most elevated of Burns's poems; and to this character it is perhaps justly entitled, but it is not one of his happiest effusions. He describes very naturally his fatigue after a day of rural labour; his imagination wandering after those scenes of ease and comparative affluence which might have been his, had he entered into business, instead of employing his time and talents in writing verses; and his half-formed vow, proceeding from these melancholy reflections, that he would henceforth be "rhyme-proof till his last breath," when he was interrupted by the appearance of the Rustic Muse of Kyle. He likewise describes her dress and appearance with great propriety; but he seems to have viewed herself and her actions, to use the words of Dryden, "through the spectacles of books." Her mantle is described, as a map of that part of Scotland in which the poet resided, with as much minuteness as Homer describes the several compartiments of the shield of Achilles; but the description is perfectly characteristic, and so contrived as to admit of compliments to some of the poet's friends, and of due praise bestowed on some of the ancient defenders of his country. He then says,

" With musing deep, astonish'd stare,
I view'd the heavenly-seeming *Fair*:
A whispering throb did witness bear
Of kindred sweet,
When, with an elder sister's air,
She did me greet.

" All hail! my own inspired Bard!
In me thy native Muse regard;
Nor longer mourn thy fate is hard,
Thus poorly low:
I come to give thee such reward
As we bestow."

She then enumerates the different employments over which so many guardian spirits preside: adding,

" *Of these am I*—Coila my name;
And this district as mine I claim,
Where once the *Campbells*, chiefs of fame,
Held ruling power:
I mark'd thy embryo tuneful flame,
Thy natal hour."

Then telling him with what hope she beheld his earliest efforts in rhyme, and warning him not to soar above rural scenes in his poetic flights, she thus concludes her address:

## THE VISION.

'AND WEAR THOU THIS' SHE SOLEMN SAID,
AND BOUND THE HOLLY ROUND MY HEAD;
THE POLISH'D LEAVES, AND BERRIES RED,
DID RUSTLING PLAY.

'Then never murmur nor repine;
Strive in thy humble sphere to shine;
And, trust me, not *Potosi*'s mine,
Nor kings' regard,
Can give a bliss o'ermatching thine,
A *rustic bard.*

'To give my counsels all in one,
Thy tuneful flame still careful fan;
Preserve *the dignity of man*
With soul erect;
And trust, the *universal plan*
Will all protect.

'*And wear thou this!*'—she solemn said,
And bound the holly round my head:
The polish'd leaves and berries red
Did rustling play;
And, like a passing thought, she fled
In light away."

*The Address to the Unco Guid, or the Rigidly Righteous,* is a severe satire on those who value themselves on their own piety and virtue, and delight in censuring their less-guarded neighbours. It is a poem as unexceptionable in its tendency as any that Burns has published; and concludes with the two following admirable stanzas:

"Then gently scan your brother man,
Still gentler sister woman;
Though they may gang a kennin wrang,
To step aside is human:
One point must still be greatly dark,
The moving *why* they do it;
And just as lamely can ye mark
How far perhaps they rue it.

"Who made the heart, 'tis *He* alone
Decidedly can try us;
He knows each chord its various tone,
Each spring its various bias.
Then at the balance let's be mute;
We never can adjust it;
What's *done* we partly may compute,
But know not what's *resisted*."

The poems on *Tam Samson* are written with great humour, and are worthy of their author; but there is perhaps nothing in them which, if torn from what precedes and follows it, would interest any reader, except a native of Kilmarnock.

The poem entitled *Halloween* is one of the most amusing in the author's whole collection. It contains a full and accurate account of various *spells* which, on the eve of All Saints, when the

devil is thought to be let loose, the youthful peasants in Scotland were wont to employ, in order to discover the form, name, and fortune, of their future husbands and wives. These superstitious follies, of which the origin is not accurately known, are going so fast into desuetude, that they would soon have been entirely forgotten, had not BURNS preserved the remembrance of them in this charming poem.

" The first of these ceremonies is the pulling of a *stock* or plant of kail. The young people, who have convened for the purpose of keeping their *Halloween*, go out under night, hand in hand, with their eyes shut, and pull the first plant that they meet with. Its being large or small, straight or crooked, is prophetic of the size and shape of the grand object of all their spells. If any earth adhere to the root, the future husband or wife is to have a fortune; and the taste of the *custoc*, or heart of the stem, is indicative of his or her temper or disposition. Lastly, the stems, or the *runts*, as they are called, are placed somewhere over the door of the house; and the Christian names of the people who happen to come first in, are, according to the priority of placing the *runts*, the names in question." All this our bard so paints in the following stanzas,

as to bring it immediately into the view of his readers.

" Then first an' foremost, through the kail,
Their *stocks* maun a' be sought ance;
They steek their een, an' graip an' wale
For muckle anes an' straught anes.
Poor hav'rel Will fell aff the drift,
An' wander'd through the *bow-kail*,
An' pou't, for want o' better shift,
A *runt* was like a sow-tail,
Sae bow't that night.

" Then, straught or crooked, yird or nane,
They roar an' cry a' throu'ther;
The vera wee-things, todlin, rin
Wi' stocks out-owre their shouther;
An' gif the *custoc's* sweet or sour,
Wi' jocteleg they taste them;
Syne coziely, aboon the door,
Wi' canny care they've plac'd them
To lie that night."

Another of these spells is performed in the following manner. Three dishes are ranged on the hearth, of which one has in it clean water, another dirty water, and the third is left empty. The person who is to try his fortune is blindfolded, led to the hearth, and desired to dip his

HALLOWEEN.

IN ORDER, ON THE CLEAN HEARTH-STANE,
THE LUGGIES THREE ARE RANGED.

*left* hand into one of the dishes. If it chance to be put into the clean water, the future husband or wife will come to the bed of matrimony a maid; if into the dirty water, a widow, or something worse; and if into the empty dish, the person making the experiment will not be married at all. This is repeated three times, the arrangement of the dishes being altered each time.

" In order, on the clean hearth-stane,
The *luggies* three are rang'd,
An' every time great care is ta'en
To see them duly chang'd.
Auld uncle John, wha wedlock's joys
Sin' Mar's year did desire,
Because he gat the toom dish thrice,
He heav'd them on the fire
In wrath that night."

These are among the simplest of the spells. Others are more awful, as they are believed to bring the devil himself on the stage, in the form of the future husband or wife; and BURNS has, with his usual strength of colouring, painted the terror of those who " dared by them to seek the foul thief to spae their fortune."

*THE Auld Farmer's New Year Morning's Salutation to his Auld Mare Maggie, on giving her*

*the accustomed Rip of Corn,* is a moral as well as pathetic address of a master to an old and faithful servant.

" A *guid new year* I wish thee, Maggie !
Hae, there's a rip to thy auld baggie;
Though thou'rt howe-backit now, an' knaggie,
I've seen the day,
Thou couldst hae gaen like ony staggie
Out-owre the lay."

He then enumcrates all her past services and exploits; and concludes with promising what every man in such circumstances, who can afford it, seems in duty bound to perform.

" An' think na, my auld trusty servan',
That now, perhaps, thou'rt less deservin,
An' thy auld days may end in starvin;
For my last *fow**,
A heapit *stimpart*†, I'll reserve ane
Laid by for you.

" We've worn to crazy years thegither;
We'll toyte about wi' ane anither;
Wi' tentie care I'll flit thy tether
To some hain'd rig,
Whare ye may nobly rax your leather,
Wi' sma' fatigue."

* A bushel. † The eighth part of a bushel.

# AULD FARMER'S SALUTATION.

A GUID NEW YEAR I WISH THEE MAGGIE,

AY THERES A RIPP TO THY AULD BAGGIE!

The address *To a Mouse, on turning up her Nest with the Plough*, has always been admired and praised; but neither praised nor admired above its merits. The following stanzas are peculiarly affecting.

"But, mousie, thou art no thy lane,
In proving *foresight* may be vain;
The best laid schemes o' *mice* an' *men*
Gang aft a-gley,
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,
For promis'd joy.

"Still thou art blest compar'd wi' *me!*
The present only toucheth thee;
But, och! I backward cast my e'e
On prospects drear!
An' forward, though I canna *see*,
I *guess* an' *fear*."

The first stanza of *The Winter Night* is perhaps the finest description of a stormy *winter day* that is to be found in any language.

"When biting Boreas, fell an' doure,
Sharp shivers through the leafless bow'r;
When Phœbus gi'es a short-liv'd glowr,
Far south the lift,
Dim darkening through the flaky show'r,
Or whirling drift."

He who, on reading these lines, does not fancy himself looking at the noon-day sun through a shower of snow or whirling drift, could not, by any criticism, be made to see their beauty or feel their force. In the same strain the poet describes the steeples rocking; the rivulets choaked up, and then bursting the barriers of snow; the doors and windows rattling by the storm through the night; and then mourns over the cattle, the sheep, the singing birds, and even the birds of prey,

"While, pitiless, the tempest wild
Sore on them beats."

He then changes his measure, and, in strains something similar to those of Collins, compares the pelting of the storm to the oppression exercised by man on man; and justly concludes, that the latter is harder to be borne than the former. He enumerates the different kinds of misery which the powerful and unprincipled bring on those who are placed below them in the gradations of society; and dwells with peculiar emphasis on those who first seduce and then desert unsuspecting female innocence.

"Is there, beneath love's noble name,
Can harbour, dark, the selfish aim,
To bless himself alone?

WINTER NIGHT.

"IT STRAINS YOUR INFANT TO HER JOYLESS BREAST.

Mark maiden innocence a prey
To love-pretending snares;
This boasted honour turns away,
Shunning soft pity's rising sway,
Regardless of the tears and unavailing pray'rs.
Perhaps this hour, in misery's squalid nest,
She strains your infant to her joyless breast,
And, with a mother's fears, shrinks at the rocking blast."

We entirely agree with the critic whom we have so often quoted with approbation, that the two different portions of this poem might be conceived to have been composed by different authors. Both are vigorously conceived; but in the measure of the latter BURNS was not practised; and the consequence is, that it seems an effort of labour.

IT is remarked by the same critic, that the writings of BURNS exhibit few traces of progressive improvement in his art. "The *Epistle to Davie, a Brother Poet*, which is the earliest of those compositions where his powers seem to have been seriously put forth, is little inferior to his latest productions. It was written about the period of his father's death, and presents an affecting specimen of his reflections under a singular accumulation of distresses. It seems to be a sort of effort to accustom his thoughts to the very

darkest possibilities of evil, and to a recollection of the consolations which will be left when his anticipations shall be realized. His consciousness of superior talents, to which his attention, at the time, had perhaps been drawn by their exertion in conversation with his brother poet, makes him consider with regret, and not without some of that indignation which was more congenial to his character, the peculiar discomforts of his situation. These are admirably described in the opening stanza, which represents the northern blast as drifting the snow to the very hearth of his wretched cottage. He then anticipates the period to which he seems so near, when the unequal distribution of external advantages may reach its extreme, and when his friend and he may be reduced to the condition of itinerant beggars. The evils of this condition he does not palliate; but sooths himself with the reflection, that, after all the gifts of fortune are gone, those of nature will remain.

" What though, like commoners of air,
We wander out, we know not where,
But either house or hall?
Yet Nature's charms, the hills and woods,
The sweeping vales and foaming floods,
Are free alike to all.

In days when daisies deck the ground,
An' blackbirds whistle clear,
With honest joy our hearts will bound,
To see the coming year.
On braes, when we please, then
We'll sit an' sowth a tune,
Syne *rhyme* till't, we'll *time* till't,
An' sing't when we hae done."

These two last lines the critic thinks feeble; but they are not feebler than many others to be found in poems by the most celebrated authors, in much less difficult measures. In the following stanza, the advantages to be derived from adversity are described with the genuine spirit of the Stoic philosophy.

" Then let us cheerfu' acquiesce,
Nor make our scanty pleasures less,
By pining at our state;
An' even should misfortunes come,
I, here wha sit, hae met wi' some,
An's thankfu' for them yet:
They gi'e the wit of age to youth;
They let us ken oursel;
They make us see the naked truth,
The *real* guid an' ill.
Though losses an' crosses
Be lessons right severe,
There's wit there, ye'll get there,
Ye'll find nae ither where."

The conclusion of this epistle is eminently happy in the exhibition of a hackneyed allegory in a new form.

No poet was ever better acquainted with the passion of love, with all its hopes and fears, its blisses and disappointments, than BURNS; and therefore no poet was better qualified to write the *Lament of a Friend, on the unfortunate Issue of an Amour.* The following stanza, in particular, is composed in the language of truth and nature.

"No idly-feign'd poetic pains
My sad love-lorn lamentings claim;
No shepherd's pipe—Arcadian strains;
No fabled tortures, quaint and tame:
The plighted faith, the mutual flame,
The oft attested powers above,
The *promis'd father's tender name*—
These were the pledges of my love."

The whole poem is in unison with this; but the limits allotted to the present work admit not of longer quotation.

WE are told by the bard's latest biographer, that his mind was of a gloomy cast, as many vigorous minds have been; and we find, accordingly, that he succeeds in nothing better than

DESPONDENCY,

OR, HAPLY, TO HIS EVENING THOUGHT,
BY UNFREQUENTED STREAM,
THE WAYS OF MEN ARE DISTANT BROUGHT,
A FAINT COLLECTED DREAM

in painting gloomy scenes. His ode entitled *Despondency* is a masterpiece in this kind of writing. After describing, in the most forcible language, his griefs and cares to be such as made life a load too heavy to be borne, he contrasts his own desponding state with that of men immersed in business; of whom he says, with philosophic truth, that even when the *end*, for which they toil and bustle, is denied to them,

"Yet, while the busy *means* are ply'd,
They bring their own reward."

He then thinks of the hermit, who seems to have as little employment as himself, and says,

"How blest the solitary's lot,
Who, all forgetting, all forgot,
Within his humble cell,
The cavern wild with tangling roots,
Sits o'er his newly-gather'd fruits,
Beside his crystal well!
Or haply, to his ev'ning thought,
By unfrequented stream,
The ways of men are distant brought,
A faint-collected dream:
While praising, and raising
His thoughts to Heav'n on high,
As wand'ring, meand'ring,
He views the solemn sky."

He regrets that he cannot, like the hermit, despise the pleasures of the world, and "heed nor human love nor human hate;" but he utters not one prayer to the Supreme to wean his heart from these things, and give him the dispositions which he envies in the hermit. Whether this be a fault or a beauty may be questioned. To the pious reader it would have been pleasing to find a fellow-creature seeking relief, under such severe affliction, in the consolations of religion: but BURNS was describing the feelings of *despondency;* and no man can be in the state of absolute despondency, who is capable of addressing his Maker in the language of devotion.

THAT BURNS was not himself without the consolations of religion under all his accumulated distresses, is apparent from the concluding stanza of the *dirge* entitled *Winter*, which was written about the same period with the ode on *Despondency*. After painting, in the most vivid colours, the effects of a stormy winter day on the face of nature, and comparing the fate of the leafless trees to his own, he thus addresses his God, in the strains, not of Stoicism, but of Christianity:

"Thou *Power Supreme*, whose mighty scheme
These woes of mine fulfil,

Here firm I rest, they must be best,
  Because they are *thy* will.
Then all I want—(O do thou grant
  This one request of mine!)
Since to *enjoy* thou dost deny,
  Assist me to *resign*."

It would not be easy to produce an effusion of piety sublimer than this, in the works of any poet, ancient or modern.

It has been observed, that in *Halloween* we have the interior of a Scottish peasant's cottage, with all its appropriate manners and customs, at the season of merry-making; and that in *The Cotter's Saturday Night* we have the same scene, under a more affecting and impressive aspect. The scene is so admirably painted in both cases, that, as we read, we fancy ourselves engaged in the sports of the former, and in the devotions and supper of the latter. The *Saturday Night* is indeed universally felt as the most interesting of all the author's poems. In some of the others there may be single passages equal to any thing in this, as, for instance, the stanza last quoted from *Winter;* but Burns has no other poem which takes such hold of all the reader's best affections as the *Cotter's Saturday Night*, and

which retains that hold, without relaxation, from the beginning to the end. We accompany the cotter as he returns weary from his labour with his *spades*, *mattocks*, and *hoes;* and we feel with him the chilling blasts of November. We share the satisfaction with which he views his *cot* at a distance, under the shelter of an aged tree; and his feelings on entering it, when he is welcomed by the smiles of his wife, and the prattling of his children. We partake of the happiness of both parents, as their more advanced children enter to pay to them their weekly visit, and give an account of the services which they perform to their several masters and mistresses. We enter warmly into the anxiety of the mother, when she discovers that their eldest hope, Jenny, had been accompanied by a lover "o'er the moor;" and into her satisfaction on finding that the young man is sober and virtuous, and that her "*bairn* is respected like the rest." We listen with attentive respect to the father, when he admonishes his children to obey their master's and their mistress's commands; to be diligent and faithful in the work appointed to them; to fear the Lord always; and never to forget their prayers morning or evening. We partake with them in their sober repast; and attend with reverence, when,

COTTERS SATURDAY NIGHT.

THE COTTAGE TURNS HER WIFE PAPA COMES GRAVE
THE MOHAWK BALANCE MAN [illegible] BLACK PRIDE

"The cheerfu' supper done, wi' serious face,
They round the ingle form a circle wide;
The sire turns owre, wi' patriarchal grace,
The big *ha'-bible*, ance his father's pride:
His bannet reverently is laid aside,
His lyart haffets wearing thin an' bare:
Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide,
He wales a portion wi' judicious care,
And, '*Let us worship God!*' he says, with solemn air."

The account which is given of the worship is perfectly correct, and highly honourable to the Scotch peasantry in general, and to the author's father in particular, from whose practice these scenes are said to have been painted. On the reflections of the author himself on the essence of devotion, too much praise cannot be bestowed; and every reader of piety and virtue will agree with him, that

"From scenes like these old Scotia's grandeur springs,
That makes her lov'd at home, rever'd abroad."

It has been already observed*, that the range of an illiterate poet's thoughts cannot be very extensive, nor the subjects on which he writes very various. Of the truth of this observation

* Page 2.

BURNS furnishes a complete proof, in the poems which, in his collection, generally succeed the *Cotter's Saturday Night*. In the dirge, entitled, *Man was made to mourn*, in the *Prayer on the Prospect of Death*, and in the *Stanzas on the same Occasion*, there is not perhaps one sentiment that is not to be found in the *Lament occasioned by the unfortunate Issue of a Friend's Amour*, *Despondency*, and *Winter*. The same sentiments, when they occur in the different poems, are indeed differently expressed, and they are always expressed perspicuously and forcibly; but as it is a very small and inferior part of BURNS's merit that rests on his language, it would be a waste of time to dwell on these differences.

The verses left at the house of a reverend friend, where he had lodged one night, are very good, but have nothing in them remarkable; and his paraphrases on the psalms are not superior to those of Tate and Brady, Watts, and Merrie; whilst they are all very far inferior to the prose translations in the Bible and the English Book of Common Prayer.

The two stanzas *To Ruin* have in them something of the spirit and manner of Gray, though in a very different measure; but they are not equal to Gray's *Ode to Adversity*, nor are they, perhaps, worthy of BURNS.

The verses *To Miss L——, with Beattie's Poems for a New-Year's Gift*, are such as might have been written by a poet very inferior to the author of the *Epistle to Davie;* and so is the *Epistle to a Young Friend*, though it has much of the spirit and manner of BURNS. The eighth stanza, in which hell is treated as a bugbear, and *honour* laid down as the criterion of right conduct, is, in a moral point of view, very exceptionable.

The verses *On a Scotch Bard gone to the West Indies*, seem to have been written on himself, when he meditated a voyage to Jamaica, on his being refused by the father of his Jean as a husband to his daughter. His own character, at least, is strikingly pourtrayed in them; though it must be confessed that they have not much merit of any other kind. They would have done honour to most rustic bards; but, as the composition of him who wrote *The Holy Fair*, *Halloween*, and *The Cotter's Saturday Night*, the utmost that can be said of them is, that they do not disgrace their author.

The verses *To a Haggis* have in them much humour; but it is humour that will be relished only by a Scotchman, and even of Scotchmen only by such as have not learned, from their neighbours on the south side of the Tweed, to banish that national dish from their tables.

The dedication of his works to G***** H*******, Esq. has much merit. This appears to be the gentleman whom *Holy Willie*, in the prayer which has been already noticed, curses in the following terms :

" L—d, mind G——n H——n's deserts,
He drinks, an' swears, an' plays at carts,
Yet has sae mony taking arts,
Wi' grit an' sma',
Frae G—d an' priest the people's hearts
He steals awa.

" An' when we chasten'd him therefore,
Thou kens how he bred sic a splore
As set the warld in a roar
O' laughin at us :
Curse thou his basket an' his store,
Kail, an' potatoes."

The same man who incurs the displeasure of *Holy Willie*, and brings these heavy curses on himself, is thus characterised in *The Dedication.*

" I readily an' freely grant,
He downa see a poor man want ;
What's no his ain he winna tak it ;
What ance he says he winna break it :
Ought he can lend he'll no refus't,
Till aft his guidness is abus'd ;

An' rascals whyles that do him wrang,
Ev'n *that*, he does na mind it lang:
As master, landlord, husband, father,
He does na fail his part in either.

" But then, nae thanks to him for a' that;
Nae *godly symptom* ye can ca' that;
It's naething but a milder feature
Of our poor, sinfu', corrupt nature:
Ye'll get the best o' moral works
'Mang black Gentoos an' pagan Turks,
Or hunters wild on Ponotaxi,
Wha never heard of orthodoxy.
That he's the poor man's friend in need,
The gentleman in word an' deed,
It's no through terror of d–mn–t—n,
It's just a carnal inclination."

THE verses *To a Louse, on seeing one on a Lady's Bonnet at Church*, would be said to be BURNS's, or at least to be worthy of him, wherever they were found. The conclusion is pretty, and *moral* as well as pretty. On observing the louse on the very top of the lady's bonnet, in full view of all that were seated near her, and the lady herself looking contemptuously around her, he says,

"O, Jenny, dinna toss your head,
An' set your beauties a' abread!
Ye little ken what cursed speed
The blastie's makin!
Thae *winks* an' *finger-ends*, I dread,
Are notice takin!

"O wad some pow'r the giftie gi'e us,
*To see ourselves as others see us!*
It wad frae mony a blunder free us,
An' foolish notion:
What airs in dress an' gait wad lea'e us,
An' ev'n devotion!"

In the *Address to Edinburgh* there is nothing particular to arrest attention. The verses are good, and not unworthy of their author; but they might have been composed by meaner poets.

The two *Epistles to J. L——k, an old Scottish Bard*, are of a superior order. The object of them is to solicit the friendship of the old poet, to whom, when they were written, Burns seems to have been an absolute stranger: and the address which he employs to accomplish this object, shews him to have been, even then, though only twenty-six years of age, perfectly acquainted with the road to the hearts of authors in general, and of poets in particular. He thus addresses the unknown bard:

## EPISTLE TO LAPRAIK.

ON FASTIN EEN WE HAD A ROCKIN,
TO CA' THIL CRACK AND WEAVE OUR STOCKIN;
AND THERE WAS MUCKLE FUN AND JOCKIN,
YE NEED NA DOUBT
AT LENGTH WE HAD A HEARTY YOKIN
AT SANG ABOUT

"While briars an' woodbines budding green,
An' paitricks scraichin loud at e'en,
An' morning poussie whiddin seen,
Inspire my muse,
This freedom, in an *unknown* frien',
I pray excuse.

"On Fasten-e'en we had a rockin,
To ca' the crack an' weave our stockin,
An' there was muckle fun an' jokin,
Ye need na doubt;
At length we had a hearty yokin
At *sang about.*

"There was *ae sang*, amang the rest,
Aboon them a' it pleas'd me best,
That some kind husband had addrest
To some sweet wife:
It thirl'd the heart-strings through the breast,
A' to the life.

"I've scarce heard ought describ'd sae weel,
What generous manly bosoms feel;
Thought I, 'Can this be Pope, or Steele,
Or Beattie's wark?'
They tald me 'twas an odd kind chiel
About *Muirkirk.*"

This comparison of the old bard to Pope or Steele or Beattie gained his friendship at once; and to the complimentary epistle, which was

written on the 1st of April 1785, an answer was so quickly returned, that we find our author writing a poetical reply on the 21st of the same month; when the two poets were so strongly attached to each other, that the second epistle is concluded with the following contrast of their own future destination with that of the sordid sons of Mammon.

" Though here they* scrape, an' squeeze, an' growl,
Their worthless nievefu' of a soul
May in some *future carcase* howl,
The forest's fright,
Or in some day-detesting owl
May shun the light.

" Then may L*****k and B**** arise
To reach their native kindred skies,
An' sing their pleasures, hopes, an' joys,
In some mild sphere,
Still closer knit in friendship's ties,
Each passing year."

The epistle *To W. S*****n, Ochiltree*, which was written about the same time with the verses to J. L*****k, and in the same measure, has considerable merit, but nothing particularly worthy

* The sons of Mammon.

of notice, except the contempt poured by the author on some theological controversies then prevalent in the south-west of Scotland.

" Sae, ye observe, that a' this clatter
Is naething but a ' moonshine matter;'
But though dull prose-folk Latin splatter,
In logic tulzie,
I hope we bardies ken some better
Than mind sic brulzie."

THE *Epistle to J. R******, inclosing some Poems*, is in the same measure; but remarkable only for coupling together, in one short poem, two subjects so perfectly distinct as the unmasking of hypocrisy and the severity of the game laws! *John Barleycorn* is a successful imitation of old ballads, perhaps not worthy of being imitated by BURNS; and the *Fragment* to the tune of *Killicrankie* is a satire on all those statesmen and generals who acted a conspicuous part in the American war.

In the last and best edition of our author's poems, these things are immediately followed by certain *Verses written in Friars-Carse Hermitage, on Nith-side.* The verses are pretty, and contain some sage counsels both to the young and to the old; of which the following is a fair specimen.

"As the shades of evening close,
Beck'ning thee to long repose,
As life itself becomes disease,
Seek the chimney-nook of ease:
There ruminate, with sober thought,
On all thou'st seen, and heard, and wrought;
And teach the sportive younkers round,
Saws of experience, sage and sound."

THESE verses are followed by what is called an *Ode, sacred to the Memory of Mrs —— of ——*; a satire as keen as that of Dr Arbuthnot, in his celebrated *Epitaph on Colonel Charteris.*

The succeeding verses are of a different order. They are entitled, *Elegy on Captain Matthew Henderson, a Gentleman who held the Patent for his Honours immediately from Almighty God.* To the elegy is subjoined an epitaph, after the example, perhaps, of Gray; but though the poet seems to have regarded his friend with great esteem and affection, the measure of the verses composing the *Elegy* seems not well adapted to the sentiments of sorrow meant to be expressed; nor would any man under the dominion of real grief feel himself disposed to play upon words, as BURNS plays on them in the epitaph.

*THE Lament of Mary Queen of Scots on the Approach of Spring*, is written in the language of

## BEARS-CARSE HERMITAGE.

A LIFE IDYLLIC BECOMES DISEASE,
SEEK THE CHIMNEY NOOK OF EASE.

LAMENT OF MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS.

BUT I THE QU. N OF S' SCOTLAND
MUST DIE IN PRISON STRONG

truth and nature. Every thing, indeed, conspired to make our author exert his powers on such a subject;---the elevated rank of the prisoner, her unparalleled sufferings, her sex, her beauty, and his own attachment to the house of Stuart, all crowded together in his mind, and banished from it every sentiment ludicrous or trifling. The following stanzas express strongly what may have passed, on the occasion, in the mind of the unfortunate queen, who was herself a worshipper of the Muses.

" Now blooms the lily by the bank,
The primrose down the brae;
The hawthorn's budding in the glen,
An' milk-white is the slae:
The meanest hind in fair Scotland
May rove their sweets amang;
But I, the queen of a' Scotland,
Maun lie in prison strang.

* * * * *

" But as for thee, thou false woman,
My sister an' my fae,
Grim vengeance yet shall whet a sword
That through thy soul shall gae.
The weeping blood in woman's breast
Was never known to thee,
Nor the balm that draps on wounds of woe,
Frae woman's pitying e'e."

The verses *To Robert Graham of Fintry, Esq.* are a tribute of respect and gratitude to one of the poet's steadiest friends and patrons; but there is less originality in them than perhaps in any other of Burns's poems. The attack on critics is mere hackneyed common-place; and is the less excusable, that hardly any other poet has had so little ground of complaint against them.

*The Lament for James Earl of Glencairn* is in a different measure from that of the Lament of Mary Queen of Scots, but not inferior to it in merit of any kind. The Earl of Glencairn was one of the poet's earliest patrons, and never deserted him to the day of his death. As the heart of Burns was susceptible of all the finer feelings, and particularly of gratitude, he thus describes a bard laden with years bewailing his lord, "whom death had all untimely ta'en."

"He lean'd him on an ancient aik,
Whase trunk was mould'ring down with years;
His locks were bleached white with time,
His hoary cheek was wet wi' tears:
And as he touch'd his trembling harp,
And as he tun'd his doleful sang,
The winds, lamenting through their caves,
To echo bore the notes alang."

LAMENT FOR EARL OF GLENCAIRN

AND AS HE TOUCH'D HIS TREMBLING HARP,

AND AS HE TUNE'D HIS DOLEFUL SANG.

The song is worthy of the bard by whom it was composed, and of the nobleman on whom it was sung. The concluding stanza shews that BURNS, however little religious he might appear to have been, was familiar with the poetical books of the Old Testament; though it may be doubted whether the use that, in the following lines, is made of the similies taken from these sacred books, be altogether proper.

"The bridegroom may forget the bride
Was made his wedded wife yestreen;
The monarch may forget the crown
That on his head an hour has been;
The mother may forget the child
That smiles sae sweetly on her knee;
But I'll remember thee, Glencairn,
An' a' that thou hast done for me."

IN the *Lines sent with the foregoing Poem to Sir John Whiteford, Baronet*, there is nothing but common-place; and very little that is entitled to great praise in the verses on the Wounded Hare. A higher character can hardly be given of the *Address to the Shade of Thomson*. What is said of the durability of Thomson's fame is true; but it might have been said by a poet very inferior to BURNS.

The *Epitaphs on a celebrated Ruling Elder*, *a Noisy Polemic*, and *Wee Johnnie*, are ludicrous and satirical; but a ludicrous epitaph on a real monument, though such things were formerly to be met with, would now be offensive to every reader of taste and feeling. The lines *On the Author's Father* do him great honour, and, had the name been inserted, would have been an excellent epitaph; but the remark of Johnson, that the omission of the name in an epitaph is a fault which scarcely any beauty can compensate, is unquestionably just: an epitaph without a name is an epitaph to be let. Of the other epitaphs, none is worthy of notice except that *For G***** H********, Esq.* whom we have already seen praised more than once by the bard, for his benevolence, and detestation of cant and hypocrisy. The same qualities constitute the subject of the epitaph.

" The poor man weeps—here G***** sleeps,
Whom canting wretches blam'd;
But with *such as he*, where'er he be,
May I be *sav'd* or *d——d!*"

To the sentiment or wish expressed in the second couplet, it may be justly objected, that it implies too great confidence in mere human virtue.

Stewart & Barnet Sculpt.

GROSE'S PEREGRINATIONS.

HE HAS A FOUTH O' AULD NICK-NACKETS:

RUSTY ARN CAPS AND JINGLIN JACKETS.

THE verses *On the late Captain Grose's Peregrinations through Scotland, collecting the Antiquities of that Kingdom,* is a very singular production. It is certainly replete with humour; but whether the bard intended it to be complimentary or satirical, might admit of a dispute that would not easily be decided. The genius of the captain, and his courage, are both highly praised; for the former is said to have been bright, and the latter to have been so steady, that he who possessed it would have fallen rather than fled; but the person of this gallant soldier is mentioned in terms far from respectful, and his favourite pursuits are exposed to contemptuous laughter. Having informed the reader that Mr Grose had quitted the profession of a soldier, and taken up the trade of an *antiquary,* the poet says,

" He has a fouth o' auld nick-nackets:
Rusty airn caps an' jinglin jackets,
Wad haud the Lothians three in tackets,
A towmont gude;
An' parritch-pats an' auld saut-backets
Before the flood.

" Of Eve's first fire he has a cinder,
Auld Tubal-Cain's fire-shool an' fender;
That which distinguished the gender
O' Balaam's ass:

A broomstick o' the witch o' Endor,
Weel shod wi' brass."

As an atonement for this ridicule of "the *antiquarian trade*," Mr Grose is praised for his convivial talents; and the author concludes his satire and compliment with saying,

"I'd take the rascal by the nose,
Wad say, Shame fa' thee."

It has been justly observed, that *Tam o' Shanter*, which was one of Burns's latest compositions, is also one of the most perfect, combining the comic archness of Prior with the terrific sublimity of Shakespeare. The character of Tam is drawn in the following verses, which, though they do not anticipate, prepare us for all the events, natural and supernatural, which are recorded in the poem.

"O Tam! hadst thou but been sae wise
As ta'en thy ain wife Kate's advice!
She tauld thee weel thou wast a skellum,
A blethering, blustering, drunken blellum;
That, frae November till October,
Ae market day thou was nae sober;
That ilka melder, wi' the miller
Thou sat as lang as thou had siller;

TAM O' SHANTER.

SHE TAI'D THEE WEEL THOU WAST A SKELLUM
A BLETHERING, BLUSTERING, DRUNKEN BELLUM,
THAT FRAE NOVEMBER TILL OCTOBER
NAE MARKET DAY THOU E'ER WAST SOBER,
AND EVERY [illegible] AD A SHOE ON
[illegible] ROARING FOU ON

That every naig was ca'd a shoe on,
The smith an' thee gat roaring fou on ;
That at the L—d's house, ev'n on Sunday,
Thou drank wi' Kirton Jean till Monday.
She prophesied, that, late or soon,
Thou would be found deep drown'd in Doon ;
Or catch'd wi' warlocks in the mirk,
By Alloway's auld haunted kirk."

We are after this conducted to an ale-house. where we feel ourselves seated with Tam at a blazing fire, and grow soon familiarly acquainted with the landlord and landlady, and the souter with whom Tam " had been fou for ouks thegither." We perceive our spirits to rise as Tam grows " glorious" with drinking ; and we sally out with him at " the key-stane hour o' night's black arch." " We accompany the hero through the tempest, we gaze with him at the window of the illuminated ruin, and shudder at the strange mixture of uncouthly horror and heaven-defying merriment." Within the ruin we are told that " Tam saw an unco sight :

" Warlocks an' witches in a dance,
Nae cotillion brent new frae France,
But hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys, an' reels,
Put life an' mettle in their heels.
A winnock bunker in the east,
There sat Auld Nick, in shape o' beast,

A towzie tyke, black, grim, an large;
To gi'e them music was his charge:
He screw'd the pipes, an' gart them skirl,
Till roof an' rafters a' did dirl.
Coffins stood round, like open presses,
That shaw'd the dead in their last dresses;
An' by some devilish cantrip slight,
Each in its cauld hand held a light;
By which heroic Tam was able
To note upon the haly table,
A murderer's banes in gibbet airns;
Twa span-lang, wee, unchristen'd bairns;
A thief new cutted frae a rape,
Wi' his last gasp his gab did gape;
Five tomahawks, wi' blude red-rusted:
Five scymitars, wi' murder crusted;
A garter which a babe had strangled;
A knife a father's throat had mangled,
Whom his ain son o' life bereft,
The grey hairs yet stack to the heft:
Wi' mair o' horrible an' awfu',
Which ev'n to name wad be unlawfu'."

That BURNS had in his mind the caldron of Shakespeare's witches when he wrote these lines, it seems impossible to doubt; but it must likewise be admitted, that the imitation does not disgrace the great original. Here, as well as in the tragedy of Macbeth, we are so completely carried out of ourselves, that "we cannot at once

Thomas Rowlandson

Heath & Reading Sculpt.

# THE WHISTLE.

THEN I PROSE OUR BARD, LIKE A PROPHET IN DRINK,

CRAIGDARROCH, THOU'LT SOAR WHEN CREATION SHALL SINK.

resume our own persons, and withdraw from the contemplation of objects, which, by superior vivacity, compensate for their want of reality." The conclusion of this singular tale conveys to the reader a lesson of prudence and virtue.

THERE is nothing worthy of particular attention in the verses which succeed *Tam o' Shanter*, except in *The Humble Petition of Bruar Water*, of which some notice has been taken already, until we come to the ballad entitled *The Whistle;* nor is there in it, as a poem, much to interest a reader of taste. The subject is a *whistle*, which was brought from Denmark by one of the attendants of Anne, who was married to James VI. king of Scotland; and it was to be held by the *tenure* of drinking! Whoever is in possession of this *whistle* is bound to give it to any gentleman who shall demand it, or to enter into a contest with him who shall drink the greatest quantity of wine. In the year 1790, it was the property of Walter Riddel, Esq. of Glenriddel; but was contended for on the 16th of October, against him, by Sir Robert Lawrie of Maxwelton and George Fergusson, Esq. of Craigdarroch. The three gentlemen, therefore, sat down to hard drinking, and chose BURNS for the umpire of the contest. After sitting from dinner until sun-rise

next morning, the prize was won by Mr Fergusson;

" When up rose our bard, like a prophet in drink:—
' Craigdarroch, thou'lt soar when creation shall sink!
But if thou would flourish immortal in rhyme,
Come—one bottle more—and have at the sublime!

' Thy line, that have struggled for freedom with Bruce,
Shall heroes and patriots ever produce:
So thine be the laurel, and mine be the bay;
The field thou hast won, by yon bright god of day!"

To attempt to ascertain the particular merit of each of Burns's songs would be an endless task. They are on various subjects, and, by the lovers of music, are all admired. Like his other poems, they exhibit such views of their several subjects, whether gay, humorous, or sad, that the reader of taste and feeling fancies every thing, of which he is reading, presented to his view. In *The Chevalier's Lament*, we see that adventurer in an attitude of the deepest despondency: Lord Strathallan is presented to us, in a cave, during a tempestuous night, lamenting the defeat at Culloden, which had left him and his party without a friend; and we see the aged pair, John Anderson and his wife, in the most interesting attitude. We enter into the feelings of

## CHEVALIER'S LAMENT.

TO FLOWERS DAILY SPRINGING, NOR BIRDS SWEETLY SINGING,

CAN SOOTHE THE SAD BOSOM OF JOYLESS DESPAIR,

## STRATHALLAN'S LAMENT.

"BLACKEST NIGHT O'ERHANG MY DWELLING

HOWLING TEMPESTS O'ER ME RAVE

JOHN ANDERSON MY JO.

LAMMAS NIGHT.

I LOCK'D HER IN MY FOND EMBRACE,

HER HEART WAS BEATING RAPIDLY;

'WILLIE BREW'D A PECK O'MA'UT.

IT IS THE MOON I KEN HER HORN.

the lovers in the song entitled *Lammas Night*; and in *Willie brew'd a Peck o' Maut* we seem to be looking on the three happy topers, when declaring themselves "*nae that fou.*" They were, the bard himself, and his two friends, Messrs William Nicol and Allan Cleghorn. But we pass on to a poem of a higher order.

Of *The Jolly Beggars*, so correct a character has been given in the first number of the QUARTERLY REVIEW, that, as we could not improve it, we shall here transcribe it for the entertainment of our readers, to whom we recommend that respectable literary journal.

"For humorous description and nice discrimination of character, this *cantata*," say these able critics, "is inferior to no poem of the same length in the whole range of English poetry. The scene, indeed, is laid in the very lowest department of low life, the actors being a set of strolling vagrants, met to carouse, and barter their rags and plunder for liquor, in a hedge ale-house. Yet even in describing the movements of such a group, the native taste of the poet has never suffered his pen to slide into any thing coarse or disgusting. The extravagant glee and outrageous frolic of the beggars are ridiculously contrasted with their maimed limbs, rags, and crutches: the sordid and squalid circumstances of their

appearance are judiciously thrown into the shade. Nor is the art of the poet less conspicuous in the individual figures than in the general mass. The festive vagrants are distinguished from each other by personal appearance and character, as much as any fortuitous assembly in the higher orders of life. . . . . The most prominent persons are, a maimed soldier and his female companion, a hackneyed follower of the camp; a stroller, late the consort of a Highland ketterer or sturdy beggar.---' But weary fa' the waefu' woodie!' Being now at liberty, she becomes an object of rivalry between 'a pigmy scraper wi' his fiddle' and a strolling tinker: the latter, a desperate bandit, like most of his profession, terrifies the musician out of the field, and is preferred by the damsel, of course. A wandering ballad-singer, with a brace of doxies, is last introduced upon the stage. Each of these mendicants sings a song in character; and such a collection of humorous lyrics, connected by vivid poetical description, is not perhaps to be paralleled in the English language."

That this is sound criticism, the reader will be convinced by the following *recitativo*, after "the mirth and fun of the company had become fast and furious," in consequence of drink and a song by the ballad-singer:

"So sung the bard—an' Nansie's wa's
Shook with a thunder of applause,
Re-echo'd from each mouth;
They toom'd their pocks an' pawn'd their duds,
They scarcely left to coor their fuds,
To quench their lowan drouth.

Then owre again, the jovial thrang
The poet did request
To lowse his pack an' wale a sang,
A ballad o' the best.
He, rising, rejoicing,
Between his twa *Deborahs*,
Looks round him, an' found them
Impatient for the chorus."

These verses present to our view the inside of Nansie's house, and the eager looks of the ragged company.

Of the remaining poems, perhaps there is not one, except *Holy Willie's Prayer*, that is in Burns's best manner; and of that prayer sufficient notice has been taken already. *The Kirk's Alarm* has little merit; and of *The Twa Herds*, though the wit of it is occasionally irresistible, the tendency is very doubtful. It is the same with that of *Holy Willie's Prayer*, though certainly less exceptionable, as the same mischief can never follow from exhibiting to public scorn

the ridiculous quarrel of two violent theologians, as from laughing at a theological system, which, whether true or false, has been held entire by some of the greatest and best of men, and is admitted by all to be not easily demolished.

On the whole, it appears that the subjects of Burns's poetry are not numerous, being confined to rural scenes, rustic manners, rustic superstitions, and the ridicule of those theological disputes which agitate the minds of the Scottish peasantry; but if his scenes be not much varied, they are all painted in the most vivid colours. His poems, therefore, are universally admired, and will long continue to be so among those to whom such scenes and superstitions are familiar; and though there are scattered through them a few images which the more serious reader may reasonably wish away, he must be easily alarmed who dreads the consequences of the poems of Robert Burns on the minds of any order of men in society.

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